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Plume of Feathers: Performativity and Performance

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Stephanie Black
MarKings Illustration and Performance Festival
8 & 9th July, 2016

Title of talk: Plume of Feathers: performativity and performance

Brief summary of talk for website (approx 60 words): This talk will begin with frictions concerning the performativity of the written thesis, and then shift from practice-led research into research-led practice and bring the argument directly to the viewer. I will focus on a project which is performed live as a visual essay to accompany a musical performance, and explore the tensions arising from different time-based aspects of the project. Questions emerging from this return the discussion to the starting point; grappling with how to create an equivalent form that reflects something of the performance.

Name and institutional affiliation (if relevant): Plymouth University

200-300 word abstract:

This talk will begin with questions concerning the performativity of the written thesis that arose from practice-led PhD research and whether it does what it says, specifically in relation to the argument's location within the "more plausible but less sharp" writing (Price, 2006). However, illustration offers the possibility of taking an argument directly to the viewer by way of image/text relationships, sequential imagery and in the case of this talk's focus a live performance of all of these things set to music. At this point the discussion will shift to research-led practice to bring research outcomes directly to the viewer.

By dissecting the issues that arise from considering time in relation to this project we will explore questions related to the maker and the viewer; of authorship and openness, and commitment to an outcome by the audience. Negotiating the balance of words, pictures and music is a challenge to my understanding of illustration as counterpoint; an opportunity for practice to provide a voice in relation to theory. Time also defines the audience and dictates to them to some extent, as the commitment of time demanded by live music discourages the casual punter from a visual background and reinforces the stratification of that artform's audience. This is set to the backdrop of institutional demands for 'significance' and 'impact'.

To counter this and be less dictatorial with the audience's time, the discussion will move on to packaging up the underlying research and visual outcomes (research *for* and research *in* illustration, to use Borgdorff's terms) into an alternative form and the questions that raises in turn. The challenge of translating the temporal aspect of the project into papers and pages returns the enquiry to the starting point of this talk; the tools illustration has at its disposal to make an argument through image and text in book form, and to try to offer an alternative to performance that reflects some of its principles.

Borgdorff, H. (2010), 'The production of knowledge in artistic research', in M. Biggs and H. Karlsson (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 44–63.

Price, E. (2006), 'Sidekick', in K. MacLeod and L. Holdridge (eds), *Thinking Through Art: Reflections on Art as Research*, Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 122–132.